

Sermon Series: “Good News for Life”
“What Is True Love and Friendship?”
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Sunday, May 2, 2021

Have you ever seen a great friendship? When people describe it it usually involves some kind of sacrifice, doesn't it? E.g., I recall a friend of mine who could help me when I was in time of need with a computer problem. E.g., I recall a story about a Hall of Fame wide receiver for the Dallas Cowboys named Drew Pearson, who was in an extremely serious car accident that ended his football career where he fell asleep at the wheel of his car and his brother was killed in the car accident; he awoke while in the hospital, he shared, and looked and saw his head coach Tom Landry sitting in his room, and that touched him a great deal. E.g., I recall the story about former Dallas Cowboys defensive back Charlie Waters after he retired and was coaching a college team, and during that time his son tragically died; this sent Charlie Waters into an emotional tailspin of depression; Roger Staubach, also retired and owner of a successful real estate firm in Dallas, told Waters to come to work for him, and showed him his office, and said he did not have to come in at all, and provided for him; Waters told that story and what a tremendous blessing that was for him. When we hear stories like that it really touches us, doesn't it? We love the idea of true friendship, because friendship is very important to us. Jesus knows the importance of true friendship.

READ John 15:12-17 (pp. 109-110)

CONTEXT: Jesus has just told His disciples that He is the true vine, and they are the branches— they are to abide in Him and bear fruit.

READ vv 12-14,17. “Jesus defined love for fellow believers as based on Him and His unlimited love. Cf. 1 John 3:16.” E.g., I recall the little children’s book published in 1994 *Guess How Much I Love You* about two nutbrown hares— Little Nutbrown Hare and the parent Big Nutbrown Hare. The child hare asks the parent hare, “Guess how much I love you”, and they go back in forth in greater and greater measures, with the parent’s measure of love dwarfing Little Nutbrown Hare. And each time Little Nutbrown Hare is impressed with the enormity of the love from Big Nutbrown Hare. This is basically what is happening here in our passage— Jesus is setting the measure of His love, and it is the highest. He tells them His commandment to them before He leaves them, that they love one another as He has loved them. This reminds us of 13:34 where Jesus said, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.” So, this begs the question, how has Jesus loved them. Jesus explains here, that greater love has no person, than to lay down his life for a friend. Truly, this is a great love. E.g., I recall watching a documentary on a battle in the Vietnam War where the American soldiers were ambushed by the North Vietnamese. Several soldiers were hit and were sprawled out over a broad area; then one of the men not hit jumped up and ran over to get a man who was shot, and picked him up, and ran with him to where there was safety with other soldiers, and he himself was shot and killed from what I recall. This soldier paid the ultimate price in trying to save his fellow soldier who was shot, and he showed an incredible act of courage and compassion. And this resembles what Jesus had done for His disciples, and for us, for Jesus added, “You are My friends”. 1 John 3:16 explains this a bit more: “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us— and we ought to lay down our lives for one

another”. What is especially noteworthy about Jesus’ command for His disciples to love as He does is the direction of that love about which He is speaking— i.e., it is not love to be shown to the unbelieving world, but amongst each other, fellow disciples. This does not mean that Jesus followers were not to love others outside of their community of believers, as Jesus clearly showed in such places as the Parable of the Good Samaritan. But rather His point is that the love believers should show one another should be of the highest level. Unfortunately, those in the Body of Christ today often have reputations as being gossips and critics of one another, and this ugliness and poison has motivated unbelievers to keep their distance. Have you ever experienced those in the Body of Christ acting badly? E.g., I recall some people leaving a church before the worship service, and they were yelling and slamming the door of the church shut as they left. E.g., I recall at a previous church I was meeting with one of leaders one-on-one in my office to discuss a plan of ministry, and we had a disagreement, and he became so heated that he took the binder in his lap and threw it to the ground and became irate. I was shocked at this behavior, and I recalled that he had a reputation for being difficult at times. I recall thinking that this type of behavior is not what the Body of Christ should be like, and later I had to address him about this. But let’s be honest, we all have acted badly from time to time to fellow believers, and perhaps we are thinking of times when we have lacked self-control. The point is, when we do, we need to apologize, and acknowledge that the Lord is not finished with us yet— which is obvious for all of us!— and but by the grace of God go I. And I must say that I see a lot of grace in you as a congregation in the way you have treated me as your pastor, and with one another. E.g., I have watched us as we have dealt with the awkward issues over the last six months— from a testy presidential election to how to deal with the coronavirus in worship services and whether or not to get a vaccine, whether or not to wear masks, etc., and we have not all agreed on these issues, but you have treated each other with respect and

love, listened to one another, agreed to be inconvenienced for one another, and have spoken well of one another. I know we are not perfect, but I am impressed with you and the way you are so willing to be a blessing to one another, and it is truly an honor to serve you as your pastor.

READ vv 14-15. “Jesus defined friendship with Him as based on one’s willingness to obey, but in the sense that one has passed from servitude to family. Cf. Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:4-7.” Now, Jesus is *not* saying that prior to this He had addressed His followers as slaves— but He did tell parables of slaves and their masters to teach on our relationship with God, as in Luke 12:35-48 and the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30). It is of interest that in the early church the apostles referred to themselves as slaves of Jesus Christ— as in Paul in Romans 1:1, James in James 1:1, and Peter in 2 Peter 1:1, But Jesus is making the point that a master will not inform his slaves of all his doings, but Jesus’ relationship with His disciples is different— they are His friends. In other places of the Christian tradition, such as Romans and Galatians, Paul contrasts the idea of being a slave to the idea of the believers being children of God; READ Romans 8:15-17. And this change in relationship is based on their being obedient to Him, to His commandments. This is a core part of Jesus’ teaching, as we mentioned last week. And this is a core element to the Old Testament’s teaching. It is not outward show of love for God that is important, but humble obedience. In Psalm 51:16-17 we read from King David, “For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” E.g., I recall I spoke harshly to a family member and hurt her feelings, and I just wanted to forget about it and not deal with it, but the Holy Spirit would not let me; the Holy Spirit reminded me that I could be the person to give sermons and lead Bible Studies, and yet with the message of the gospel touched my life in an area I need to repent and apologize to the person I hurt, I was not very

motivated, and wanted to ignore it. So, by the grace and mercy and power of the Holy Spirit, I went back and apologized. Jesus said, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

READ v 16. “For the third time in this gospel Jesus emphasized that an abiding, loving relationship with Him involves requests that are granted — in the context of bearing fruit. Cf. 14:13; 15:7; Matthew 7:7-11.” READ Matthew 7:7-11. This is not to say that God will somehow be obligated to grant our prayer requests, but He will do mighty things for the goal of the gospel bearing fruit in people’s lives. E.g., I think of a huge prayer request answered in Roger Cull’s being with us in church and looking so good and healthy and getting better sleep; seeing him here today is strong evidence that God grants the prayers of His children. Let us not refrain from bold prayers for God to do great things for His glory—the Lord cherishes such prayers from His children!

“Do our lives give evidence of this best of friendships?” We can have no better friend than Jesus, and we show our friendship to Him today by obeying His commandments, one of the major ones being that we love one another, in good times and in bad times, just as He has loved you and me! We need to grow as the Body of Christ to continue show love to one another. And we need to go to Jesus *first* with our problems and questions before seeking out others. He is the type of friend to us who would love that, and is certainly worthy of that!

